



Gaited Horsemanship



with

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Learning More About Our Aides

By: Jennifer Bauer

As we learn more, the more we find out we need lessons. As we go from instructor to instructor, one tells us to do one thing and another tells us to do the opposite. If you could just think about this, how do you do a circle? How many different ways have you heard about doing a circle? How many different aids have people told you to give? One person says use your inside leg and another tells you to use your outside leg. Each instructor has their own reason and they all seem to make sense. Then we get confused and give up or get very frustrated causing us to get tight and then muscle our horse around. Just imagine how our horse feels. Why can't we all just agree? If we are confused about the aids our horse is going to be confused so we need to start to be clearer on what our aids are. When we talk to our horse with clear aids we build confidence in the horse. When we talk about using our aids clearly it's like everyone speaking the same language. Giving conflicting aids is like having a relationship where one speaks English and one speaks German. You can sometimes get the job done but with a lot of confusion. To clear up any confusion we need to be clear in our aids through our seat aids, leg aids, or a combination of aids.

What is our seat? Our seat is from one knee to the other knee. Our seat is not us sitting on our pockets. If we get on our pockets while riding, we will not be able to use our thighs or our calves. The seat is where all our aids begin to be used. We cannot use or should not use any other aid without the use of our seat. A real rider uses their seat to move their horse around their other aids, this is what is meant by core strength, and it is having a strong seat. What are our leg aids? We have our upper thighs and our calves. We need to have this contact to help our horse and help us use our aids. Here is a helpful exercise to try to help get a feel for your leg aids. What I want to do is lift my leg up, bring my knee out, and allow my leg to fall alongside the horse all the way down to the heel. What this does is allow my leg to get into full contact with the horse so I can use my whole leg.

Now that we have defined our seat and leg aids we need to know what they are used for and how we use them. Our calves need to be used to talk to the hind legs of the horse. Our right calf talks to the right hind leg and our left calf talks to the left hind leg. Our thighs work on the shoulder of the horse. When we talk to our horses in this way, the conversation becomes more and more clear. When we talk more clearly to our horses, when problems arise, the conversation will be clear to make those problems go away.

The aids can be used alone or with each other. If you have been to any one of our clinics or

watched our videos, we have exercises like turn on the forehand or turn on the haunches. During these exercises we will use the aids with each other to help the horse do the exercises. We need to be aware of when we use our aids and when we don't use our aids. If our horse is leaving the shoulder in his circle, are we accidentally putting our upper thigh on the horse or not putting our opposite upper thigh on the horse? If I sit on my upper thigh or put weight into my upper thigh that will move my horse away from that aid and then my horse will not go in a circle. I have given many lessons and taken many lessons where the rider doesn't realize they are putting on aids.

By understanding our seat and our leg aids and using them in combination our aids become clearer. Being clear in my leg aids allow me to have a clearer communication between me and my horse. When we use our aids and there is a communication between us and the horse, we build confidence and build a constant conversation. Problems arise when there is a lack of communication. When using the aids we need to speak one language all the time.

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